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SUBJECT: APHSCT TOWNSEND'S VISIT TO MOROCCO

Classified by Ambassador Thomas Riley for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (S/NF) Summary: During her July 6-8 visit to Morocco, Frances Fragos Townsend, Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism, met with the chiefs of Morocco's intelligence service, the internal security service, the chief of the national police, the Minister of Interior, and his deputy, a senior royal advisor. Townsend thanked her hosts for Morocco's excellent cooperation in the global war on terrorism, including significant efforts to shut down the foreign fighter pipeline to Iraq. The Moroccans affirmed that they highly value security cooperation and support from the USG as they continue to confront a substantial and growing terror threat that extends across North Africa and the Sahel. Townsend also visited the sites of twin suicide bombings near the U.S. Consulate-General and the (private) American Language Center and received a briefing on efforts to augment security for U.S. buildings and personnel in the city. End summary.

12. (S/NF) Frances Fragos Townsend, Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism, was hosted for a July 7 working lunch in Rabat by Yassine Mansouri, Chief of the External Studies Directorate General (DGED), Morocco's premier intelligence agency. Joining the lunch were Abdelatif Hammouchi, Director-General for Territorial Surveillance (DGST), which has the lead on domestic counterterrorism operations, and Charki Draiss, Chief of the National Police force (DGSN). Townsend was accompanied by Ambassador Riley, Adnan Kifayat and John Pearson of the NSC staff, and Emboffs.

13. (S/NF) Welcoming Townsend to Morocco, DGED Chief Mansouri affirmed that the country has enjoyed a long-standing and very cooperative security relationship with the USG, to the benefit of both sides. Townsend expressed U.S. satisfaction with the security relationship and particular gratitude for Morocco's robust efforts to shut down the foreign fighter pipeline to Iraq. The Moroccans made clear that stopping foreign fighters bound for Iraq or other destinations was a major GOM priority.

14. (S/NF) DGST Chief Hammouchi noted that Morocco has disrupted 83 different terrorist cells since the 2003 Casablanca bombings. A number of cells identified have had connections to the Algerian GSPC, he noted. Mansouri added that the terrorist adversary is "very strategically minded" and is always seeking ways to maximize the impact of attacks by exploiting outside events. Townsend strongly agreed: The timing of the attempted car bombs in London and the Glasgow airport attack to coincide with the transition from the Blair to the Brown government, was a case in point, she opined.

¶15. (S/NF) Townsend asked her hosts about the GOM's approach to monitoring and controlling materials that can be precursors to explosives. TATP, which was used in the April attacks in Morocco, is made from readily available ingredients, she noted. Hammouchi stated that the broad availability of explosive precursors was a source of frustration for the GOM. He recalled a case in which a violent Jihadist had sent his wife on 38 separate trips, in multiple cities, to buy hydrogen peroxide from pharmacies. "Our only weapon against this phenomenon is information," Hammouchi opined.

¶16. (S/NF) The security chiefs underlined their conviction that the terrorist threat to Morocco was transnational in nature. At least 12 cells wrapped up in recent years have had direct connections to groups operating in Algeria, Northern Mali, and Spain. Of particular concern is recent information that a number of individuals in terror camps in Northern Mali have moved from training units to operational units. This information, and the approach of important events on Morocco's political calendar, such as the "Fete du Throne" (Throne Day) and the parliamentary elections in early September, prompted Morocco to elevate its alert level on July 5.

¶17. (S/NF) Townsend asked the security chiefs for their assessment of CT cooperation between the countries of the Maghreb region. Cooperation with the Algerians was erratic, Hammouchi assessed. Sometimes they provide very good information and sometimes it seems like a one-way street. They make difficult partners, Mansouri added, speculating that they still suffered psychic trauma from their bloody

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struggle against terror in the 1990s, a battle they fought largely on their own. Security cooperation with Libya has been good, Mansouri noted, they are ready to work with us and exchange information. There has been an improvement in cooperation with the Tunisians as well, he continued, though he opined that they are still prone to denial in assessing the terror threat.

¶18. (S/NF) Turning to the ideological front in the war on terror, the security chiefs affirmed that CT disruption and preemption operations alone were not sufficient to defeat the enemy. "We have had to become involved in the ideological battle, even if this isn't our business," Hammouchi stated. "Unfortunately, political and diplomatic restraints often limit our ability to act," he added. Citing President Bush, Townsend affirmed the U.S. belief that the war of words and ideas is a core theater of battle, but often an area where Muslim leaders can be more effective than Americans.

¶19. (S/NF) Townsend asked about lines of authority within the Moroccan government in pursuing the ideological battle against terrorists. Mansouri responded that there was a diffusion of authority, with the security agencies, the Ministry of Communications, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs all countering extremism in different ways. Townsend observed that this mirrored the diffusion of counter-extremist efforts in the USG, but wondered if both systems wouldn't benefit from centralization of efforts.

¶10. (S/NF) Subsequent to the lunch, Minister of Interior Chakib Benmoussa welcomed Townsend, the Ambassador, NSC staff, and emboffs to his office. The Minister was joined by Minister-Delegate Fouad Ali Himma (who, as a long-standing friend and close advisor of King Mohammed VI, is generally considered more powerful than the Minister), and senior MOI officials Khalid Zerouali, Mohieddine Amzazi, Nouredine Benbrahim, and Abderahmane Achour.

¶11. (S/NF) Affirming her appreciation of strong bilateral security cooperation, Townsend asked her hosts for more background on Morocco's recent decision to elevate its state

of alert. The Minister said that information developed following recent arrests of Moroccans in the U.K., Spain, and Morocco, a continuing stream of general threat information, and upcoming events including the Fete du Throne and the legislative elections all prompted Moroccan security officials to conclude that it would be prudent to elevate the alert level.

¶12. (S/NF) Townsend expressed understanding, mentioning the USG's experience that it was relatively easy to raise the alert level, but more difficult to bring it back down. Explaining such decisions to the public was always tricky, she added. Himma agreed that the relationship between the security services and the public was crucially important and merited constant attention. Educating the public about the nature of the threat and enlisting them as allies is particularly important he added.

¶13. (S/NF) Defending the Malikite rite of Islam, native to Morocco, against intolerant theological strains flowing out of the Middle East was a major priority for King Mohammed VI and his government, Himma emphasized. He asserted that in Morocco "our people are religious and conservative, but not fundamentalist. Our rite is completely opposed to radical theology." Himma cited recent efforts to overhaul and upgrade the religious education system in the country, traditionally subsidized by the monarchy. The GOM is working hard to strike a balance between Moroccan tradition and modernity, seeking to take the best from both. Himma also cited the King's human development initiative, launched in 2005, as an important piece of the counter-extremist puzzle.

¶14. (S/NF) Townsend complimented the Minister for Morocco's apparent success in integrating various elements of the GOM involved in countering terror and extremism into a cohesive team. Himma affirmed that the GOM strives to work as one integrated unit, and also lauded the strong security cooperation Morocco enjoys with countries like the U.S. and Spain. "But our ambition is even higher," Himma continued. We would like to have the same level of coordination and cooperation with our neighboring countries, particularly Algeria.

¶15. (S/NF) Recalling a visit to Algiers as the King's personal envoy, Himma asserted that repeated Moroccan efforts

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to bridge the diplomatic chasm had been rebuffed. He claimed that he had told the Algerians that Morocco was prepared to reopen its border and take any of a number of other confidence building measures, "but the Algerians would never tell us what they want." He attributed what he described as Algerian intransigence to a generational and mind-set gap between the leaderships of the two countries. Noting that Algiers was the next stop on her multi-country itinerary, Townsend said she would encourage the GOA to expand security cooperation with Morocco and to work hard to realize a broader rapprochement with its neighbor.

¶16. (S/NF) Prior to her arrival in Rabat, Townsend visited the U.S. Consulate General in Casablanca, which was targeted during a twin suicide bomb attack on April 14. The CG, RSO, and Emboffs briefed Townsend on the incident, showing her the site of the bomb which detonated near the Consulate General, and the site of the bombing which targeted the American Language Center one block away, which was apparently mistaken for a USG facility. Townsend reviewed CCTV footage of the attack, and received a briefing on upgrades being implemented to enhance the physical security of Consulate facilities and personnel.

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RILEY